

The Middle-Eastern Mythology in Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*

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ملخص البحث

تسلط الدراسة الحالية الضوء على معنى او مفهوم الاسطورة الشرق أوسطية لدى الشاعرة والروائية الكندية كويندولين ماكوين(1941-1987) والتي ظهرت كأحد ابرز كتاب كندا خلال حقبة الستينات والسبعينات من القرن العشرين، بدأ فن صناعة الأسطورة، على يدي كويندولين ماكوين، بالارتباط بصورة بالغة بوجهة نظر الفرد الشخصية تجاه العالم من حوله، فقد اعتادت ماكوين على استعارة الأفكار والصور التخيلية من الماضي ومن الحضارات البعيدة جداً لتزود تراثها الكندي بالعناصر الضرورية لأتشاء تاريخه ومجده المستقل، فالاهتمام بعالم الشرق الأوسط يعد جزءاً من اهدافها الأساسي في إعادة هيكلة الماضي المشرق بكل صوره التامة، فهي بذلك تبحث عن عالم الروحانية لكونها تعتقد بضرورة إيجاد مرتبة أعلى من مراتب الرضا أو الاستكفاء الذاتي، يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة الاسطورة الشرق اوسطية في مجموعتها الشعرية الاساسية قصائد تي.إبي. لورنس.

Abstract

The present study sheds the light on the meaning of the middle-eastern myth in the poetry of the Canadian poet as well as novelist Gwendolyn MacEwen(1941-87). Gwendolyn MacEwen acts as one of the best significant authors during 1960s as well as 1970s in Canada. At the hands of Gwendolyn MacEwen, myth-making begins to be connected more considerably with the character's peculiar view-point. The myth which MacEwen employs is functionally important for expressing a world-view. She used to derive images as well as ideas from past as well as far away cultures in order to deepen her Canadian tradition with the most indispensable essentials for fashioning its independent history and glory. The attention towards the middle-eastern world is part of her extreme intention of rendering a glorious and brilliant time in which perfection could be touched appropriately. She searches for a world of mysticism and spirituality which she thinks necessary for finding higher degree of self-sufficiency. This study intentions to handle the middle-eastern mythology in Gwendolyn MacEwen's masterpiece *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*.

Introduction

The Canadian poet as well as novelist Gwendolyn MacEwen acts as one of the most productive and profligate writers during the age of celebrity in Canadian literature (1955-1980). During this epoch, Canadian authors uphold new guidelines of exploring and smearing the use of myth in their productions. MacEwen asserted making herself a poet from about early age. She never pays consideration to the nature of literature in Canada in her own time, which disregards the role of women's works in the restructuring of its tradition as well as history. MacEwen, however, begins her poetry writing when issuing her first poem in the famous Canadian journal *The Canadian Forum* at the age of sixteen. Throughout the late 1950s, Canadian literary movements were largely recognized for men writers. Women, sufficiently, were considered to do home tasks and be away from public concerns. MacEwen, in a overturned trend, demonstrates a more gifted individuality. She elects to write poetry when women writers were still functioning on female accomplishments and thus, she acts to have a acknowledged position between Canadian poets. Margaret Atwood pronounces MacEwen's gifted poetic aptitude as, "Over these years she created, in a remarkably short time, a complete and diverse poetic universe and a powerful and unique voice, by turns playful, extravagant, melancholy, daring and profound. To read her remains what it has always been: an exacting but delightful pleasure, though not one without its challenges and shadows."¹

In 1966, she wrote her effective poetry collection *A Breakfast for Barbarians*. In 1964, she composed a verse play *Terror and Erebus*. Throughout her life, MacEwen penned ten volumes of poetry, two novels, two collection of short stories, a travel book to Greece, several radio plays as well as biographies, two collections of children's poetry as well as a theatrical work. She has acknowledged various Canada council awards, the 1969 Governor General's Awards for her collection of poetry, *The Shadow-Maker*, as well as the 1973 A.J.M Smith poetry Award for *Armies of the Moon*. MacEwen's first self-published volumes of poetry is *Selah* and *The Drunken Clock* in 1961 as well as *The Rising Fire* in 1963. She likewise issued two novels. Her first novel is *Julian the Magician* written at the age of eighteen, but published in 1963, her second novel is *King of Egypt, King of Dreams* in 1972.² MacEwen was born in Toronto in September 1941. She lived as well as felt the most challenging conditions of world war. Her life was not that cooperative. Her aim of being a poet was similar to any other dream of an adolescent. She began writing poetry in a tremendously early age, about ten and issuing it nearly at sixteen. The first poem that she penned was printed in the well-known Canadian journal *The Canadian Forum*. At eighteen, MacEwen left high school to focus on poetry writing. Such an impulsive activity in Canadian literature was not publicly received. The life of conventional domestic culture of Canada was not prepared to be unlocked to such wholehearted spirit that MacEwen displays. From her childhood, she decided to write poetry and she deserted her nickname, Wendy. She anticipated that she is going to be an significant person in the future. She was keen to magic, history and myth-making. From young age, she was preoccupied by the search for the intelligence. She was arranging to be a poet and contended on attending poetry readings as well as radio writings.³

As a poet, Gwendolyn MacEwen's main devotion is focused on language as well as myth-making. She has its place in the mythopoeic group view. Concomitant to this view, poets should

focus on subjects that encourage correspondences between real life as well as story. For MacEwen herself, the emphasis should be on the organization of the mythical reality. She perceives reality as a world that is not restricted to one time as well as place, but is unlimited as well as unlocked.⁴ MacEwen considers poetry a kind of impulsive impressionistic creation. It never requires a stressed work to be shaped from the part of the poet, rather it goes through the poet's mind in the similar way air goes through lungs. When she writes on something private in her life, the inner person in herself never splits from the poet who creates the poem. In this case, the reader can observe her own self and persona more than others. For her, poetry does not want any clarification. It is simply comparable to any other sensual process. And that the poet does not have to explain his poetry, but merely leaves his tongue free. Vagueness of her tragic life can be felt all through her poetry. MacEwen's inventiveness springs from her aptitude of blending the old myths with new notions. In Gwendolyn MacEwen's poetry there is always a sort of communicated feeling as well as thematic strength. Simplicity as well as plainness are noticeable potentials of her poetry. She has an exceptional existence that can be touched fervently in her poetry. MacEwen's renowned declaration is demonstrated in her representative claim of creating a myth as she, in more than one incident, stresses her intention of inaugurating a myth. She uses the myth as indispensable device by which she can make a framework for genuineness.⁵

MacEwen goes to the past for those ancient myths from the earliest civilizations as an effort to redefine her present situation. She sees her accomplishments to pursue out myths from ancient world as a code for reconstructing her poetic fancy. Poetry, for MacEwen, has a language that all have to absorb. For MacEwen, the mythical is the only current countenance. She uses the mythical foundation in most of her literary pieces. She disputes that mythological symbols are essential for understanding reality. MacEwen's desire to create myth is defensible according to the way she uses myth to debate psychological problems. Conferring to MacEwen, the poet is thought to refute any alterations between real life as well as the inner life of the psyche. She seeks the innate senses of things. She does not rely on in time restrictions. Her outdated pictures as well as opinions used to denote the human alterations. She never enchants herself in one corner or subject, but recounts her subjects to general subjects from diverse nations as well as civilizations.⁶

MacEwen significantly haunts a palpable place in Canadian poetry. She principally captures a stuff of being amongst the realists and myth-makers. She is highly affected by romantic theory of mysticism, specifically that of Blake as well as Yeats. Her poetry presents a world of the mythic as well as the exotic. She contemplates that living in a world of imagination is a suitable way of determining all dissimilarities in one's life. Moreover, she transports her mythic-developed gifts from her deep attainment of things which are mystical as well as eccentric. MacEwen is so vigorous to the myth of typical measures. Her poetry encompasses figures as well as symbols that primarily have a dream-like tension, free from any limitations or restrictions of one setting or situation. The sense of awe, mystery as well as danger is a exceptional code in her poetry. Though she employs a humble language of clarity of vocabulary, yet her poetry replicates her deep as well as complex mentality.⁷

In addition, MacEwen makes the mythological, the mystical as well as the magical. She pursues for the mythic ends of stories as well as the profound implication that circles around the

core of being. In her poetry, she weaves the mysterious with the actual to provide history a mythic manifestation. The mixture of the magical with the real is what creates MacEwen's translation of mythical understanding. MacEwen thinks the best method of giving glory to history is by mythologizing it. "History is merely history, it is only glorified through myth".⁸ She pursues out attempts to re-mythologize a facet of a culture. And by doing so, she discovers out that it is only myth that can give the sense of magic as well as fantasy to the history of a culture. MacEwen's handling of a myth is revealed in the way the unreal as well as the magical is obtained in the real. Her myths are presented in a way that is free from one time as well as place. They are never organized by one place or one culture, relatively MacEwen's myths are cross-cultural. They deal with features of other cultures a way from Canada. MacEwen's mythological explanation stresses a chief role in joining her poetry to other nations outside Canada.

The idea of dealing with middle-eastern mythology in Gwendolyn MacEwen's poetry does not refer to political resistance or studies of reports on human rights. It is primarily concerned with a sort of present adaptation of a way of thinking that sees the east. This assumption reads western benefits in studying the east. In her hands, the care towards the middle-east tends to be much more noticeable and notorious. MacEwen's middle-eastern culture is that sort of unusual and archetypal civilization that she requests too much. She does not debate the west-east relationship as constrained to colonizer-colonized inconsistency, but as a demonstration of her extreme pursuit for place or a country that is mythical as well as far away from the naïve as well as hollow vision that she defies in her society. MacEwen, on one hand, attempts to escape the increase of unrevealed formulas of life that she observes in Canada. This is due to the fact that Canada at MacEwen's time was not that great country that can attain what a poet desires, principally what MacEwen requests, since she represents that kind of poet who seeks the core of things. She is the poet who tries to discover the genius, the miraculous as well as the profound image of being. On the other hand, MacEwen realizes the east as the culture that is donated with glory as well as rich heritage. She reveries of such mystical as well as spiritual place, of a place which gives identity as well as history. The glorious as well as mythical world that she foresees in the middle-east is wider as well as greater than Canada. Such land can understand as well as welcome her excited soul more than her country.⁹

The mode Gwendolyn MacEwen expounds middle-eastern mythology is neither founded on taking images of Mesopotamian lands as well as creating serious urgings on them nor on showing the act of cultural variances as part of political or imperial establishments. MacEwen is after something private. She looks to the east as part of her mythic resourcefulness. She never pays care to time. The actual world as well as inventive world are not divided for her. The countries of the east are manifestations for MacEwen's preoccupation with the mystical. In 1967, MacEwen made travelled to Egypt. She is dedicated to Egyptian culture and its heritage. She believes that a rich culture similar the Egyptian culture is the only sphere that can enclose her sophisticated mentality. MacEwen considers the middle-eastern culture in general a manifestation of her open-ended dreams of discovering the mysterious. In addition, MacEwen is a poet of great motivations. She considers life unimportant when humans can not feel the sense of pain. Therefore, she can understand things merely when she herself practices them.¹⁰

Solely, the term “Middle- Eastern Mythology” represents MacEwen’s personal adaptation of a mode of thinking. It is principally engaged for the purpose of proposing a kind of mythic imagination that the poet employs. Moreover middle-eastern mythology expounds MacEwen’s interpretation of her personal experience as well as its response in her poetry. MacEwen wishes to attract the care towards the artistic as well as literary outcomes of her own experience in the middle-east. In her poetry, the tension of the east is spread evidently as she designates or narrates everyday details in middle- eastern cities. As if she attempts to make her readers like as well as feel pain at equal. She wishes them to see what she saw. The magic of the east always arouses her soul.¹¹

MacEwen’s fantasy of elevating the other world is part of her mythical fancy. She turns to the culture of the middle-east in an effort to realize the magic as well as divine universe. She has that adventurous soul that aids her to escape her own identity as well as searches for another being. Her imagination is not limited at one country as well as definite period of time, but time is boundless, the place is everywhere one discovers his myth. This is the world in relation to MacEwen. She produces reality in a mythic construction. That is, she selects an aspect from her life as well as infers it according to a middle-eastern atmosphere. In this case the whole mythical being of middle-eastern life is defined in her poetry in a kind of expanded mystical portrayal. Thus by doing so, she discovers the cosmic that she recognizes about Arab environments. The concern in handling with the history as well as symbols of another culture is what makes critics as well as poets see MacEwen as a poet who writes about the outside more than the inside. The act of writing on middle-eastern culture is by itself stimulating since she sees that culture as a source of ultimate delight as well as power.¹²

In addition, one of the motives that led MacEwen to study the middle-east is examining the balance in a dis-united world. She continuously expounds on the necessity to feel one moment in which all proceedings are gathered. The aptitude of creating a myth arises from this, and the travel behind time as well as place far away to the earliest eastern culture carries with it a noble drive of giving a explanation of an individual’s tainted identity in the modern age. Within middle- eastern mythology, MacEwen selects or picks from ancient eastern cultures , then she creates her own understanding of such perspective. MacEwen, by taking such a role, aids in revising a blooming feature of very old cultures. She creates a commonplace reality that is often misinterpreted.¹³

In 1982, Gwendolyn MacEwen’s most respected and integrated work, *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*, was published. In this book, MacEwen produces her most deliberate portrait that concentrates on the life in the middle-east. *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* is Gwendolyn MacEwen’s own version of her reading of the story and life of Thomas Edward Lawrence, the British military officer who went to Arabia to be as diplomat representing British army during the events of the World War I. Lawrence, then acquired the fame of being Lawrence of Arabia. When he travelled to the lands of the middle-east, Lawrence was only a postgraduate researcher, with a capacity for literary writing. His most alarming book is *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the work that displays Lawrence’s war experiences and lifetime in Arab lands. Lawrence lives a real experience in Arabia resulting in his profound knowledge and familiarity with customs and life-styles of the middle-eastern world. He was devoted to the lands of Arabia as any other admirer for eastern life, he even participated in the Arab revolt against Ottoman Empire. Lawrence

helped the Arabs in their revolt against the Turkish attacks, attempting to be a leader for the Arabs in their fight. Stephen E. Tabachnick wrote a book entitled *The T. E. Lawrence Puzzle*, which is about the mystery of Lawrence and his decision of travelling to the middle-east. Tabachnick claims,

Lawrence was an obvious candidate for intelligence work when world war I began in 1914 and soon found himself making maps of Turkish army dispositions and gathering information on Bedouin tribes for British intelligence based in Cairo...Lawrence found in this project an appeal to many levels of his personality and intellect.¹⁴

In his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence definitely narrates what happened to him in Arab lands and his critical position as a British military soldier serving the Arabs. During the events of the World War I and particularly in 1916, Lawrence finds himself in a position that makes him creating a leading role with the Arab fighters against the Turks. At that time, Arab tribes were led by the family of Sheriff Hussein of Mecca and Lawrence skillfully finds a leading position among Bedouin tribes. The real Lawrence of Arabia successfully keeps a vital role of undertaking diplomatic courses as an agent representing British colony. This role of participating the Arabs in their own war against the direction of Ottoman Empire helps in picturing the personality or character of Lawrence not merely as a writer or a translator, but as acting many functional roles in Arab lands. Tabachnick mentions the state of multi-layered roles that Lawrence adopts:

His career was multifaceted; his self-regard was deeply divided; and views of his personal, cultural, and political legacy have been spread across a spectrum running from hero worship to bitter condemnation. Archaeologist, intelligence agent, guerrilla leader, military theorist, diplomat, writer, translator, book designer, mechanic and guilt-scarred flagellant, love and hater of publicity, and boyish leg puller, Lawrence's personality and roles in life are so various that it requires the combined effort of scholars in many fields to put together the pieces of puzzle he represents.¹⁵

The character of Lawrence in Gwendolyn MacEwen's poetry differs comparatively. *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* is MacEwen's own interpretation of Lawrence's condition as a western British agent living in the desert of the middle-east. MacEwen produces the character of Lawrence as a direct reflection of her own personal experience in the middle-east though the circumstances may be different for her and Lawrence, yet her poems suggest a kind of intimacy between her own view and Lawrence's experiences of living in middle-eastern countries. What increases her ultimate interest in re-defining a very prominent character like Lawrence of Arabia is her strong admiration of the real character who lived in Arab cities and wrote his famous *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the book that expresses the real experiences of one of the most enigmatic heroes of twentieth-century, the man who gained the reputation as one of the most complicated figures among twentieth century British soldiers. Professor John M. Mackenzie wrote a book about Thomas Edward Lawrence describing his reason behind looking towards Arab culture saying:

If Lawrence responded to any call it was to a narcissistic call of the self, but in his desert journey he disappeared into a conventional realm of wandering, a magical and a tawistic world of feudal Arab warriors exhibiting a rough chivalric medievalism... Like the nineteenth-century heroes Lawrence was a complex mixture of apparent opposite, a recluse who fled from the fame he courted...a seeker after archaeological truth who flourished on deception and lies... or a

gentle soul who sought extremes of self-abasement and punishment. Lawrence wanted to be a hero from his early days.¹⁶

Gwendolyn MacEwen uses the character of Lawrence as an attempt to describe what she herself believes about the east. She retells the story of Lawrence's life in the east according to her own reflected imagery. She considers Lawrence's endeavors to become a hero in the middle-east as ironic, though she wrote poems that deal with him as a hero. The poems are evidently personal, they embody the speaker's own personal impressions and his reflected impacts on what he senses. MacEwen's depiction of Lawrence of Arabia is part of her immense capacity of imagining the east in the light of Lawrence's experiences. The poems in the book reveal a careful attempt to define what the main character (Lawrence) feels in every context. MacEwen finds in Lawrence her second half that sees the east and senses the experience of living there. Rosemary Sullivan, MacEwen's biographer, refers to MacEwen's choice of the character of Lawrence of Arabia as:

Gwen found in Lawrence an embodiment of the schizophrenia of his culture. Lawrence was addicted to war, to its theory and philosophy; he was brilliant at it, manipulating its physical, technical, and metaphysical components. He was uniting the Arabs as a fighting force in the name of an idea: Freedom.¹⁷

The T.E. Lawrence Poems is a book volume associated directly with the description of the character of Lawrence of Arabia in the light of MacEwen's own interpretation of his existence in the deserts of the middle-east. The book is divided into three main parts, each of them provides an outlined portrait about the speaker's condition and maintains an over-all clarification of middle-eastern environments. The first part of the book entitled *The Dreamers of the Day: for Dahoum*, which consists of twenty-three poems which indicate certain crucial subjects on Lawrence's own personal life and conceptions. Most of them deal with Lawrence's psychological problems and his individual conceptions as a distributed mentality in modern times. No doubt that some of the poems are directed towards describing aspects of the middle-eastern place inhabited by him, yet these poems are less specialized with the detailed references towards the middle-east which are displayed in the second part of the book, entitled *Solar Wind: The War*. This part is specifically attributed to Lawrence's personal reactions to what he sees and feels while living among the Arabs. Moreover the second part of the book narrates important images that accompany the different war events which Lawrence lives and participates during the Arabs' fights against the Ottomans. The third and last part of the book continues the illuminated images that Lawrence is provided with while living among the Arabs as a western leader. It also adds to the result of experiencing the world of the other far away culture. The part is entitled *Necessary Evils: Aftermath* consists of twelve poems which outline Lawrence's final attitudes towards the Arab culture and with this attitude MacEwen's own understanding towards the Arab becomes much more obvious and expressive.¹⁸

When choosing Lawrence as the principal character and narrator, MacEwen tries to re-assure a mythical hero who reaches the portrait created in her imagination about him. Harold Orland comments on Lawrence's heroism "Lawrence's forcefulness and honesty made a powerful impression," says Orland, "He outlasted my other heroes"¹⁹. MacEwen chooses Lawrence as her twin and uses his voice skillfully in a way that represents the mythical hero as a man living in

Arab deserts and tries to understand all ambiguities that trouble his thoughts. She creates a character who is endowed with complete and coordinated qualities which enable him to express general conceptions and attitudes that MacEwen tries to show. By speaking in his voice, she admits the possibility of addressing what she herself thinks and feels in the same contexts and occasions. All incidents in the poems are narrated in Lawrence's voice and thus MacEwen's views can be more tangible. In MacEwen's poem "Apologies", which comes from the second part of the book, MacEwen presents prominent issues of Arabian life and discusses them in the light of her own understanding of the situation. The poem is narrated on a psychological level discussing Lawrence's feelings and reactions towards his own deeds among Arab people. MacEwen's choice of the character of the historical Lawrence is no more than an attempt to re-create another personal view of the middle-eastern life depending on the act of living an experience. However, the poem is rich in meaning. It offers crucial ideas that constitute MacEwen's main indications on her attitude towards Arabian lands:

I did not choose Arabia; it chose me.
The shabby money that the desert offered us bought lies,
bought victory.
What was I,
that soiled Outsider, doing among them?
I was not becoming one of them, no matter what you think.
They found it easier to learn my kind of Arabic,
than to teach me theirs. And they were all mad;
they mounted their horses and camels from the right.²⁰

The opening statement of the poem surprisingly declares Lawrence's most alarming claim "I did not choose Arabia; it chose me". The line carries within it Lawrence's claim that going to Arabia is no longer than a matter of destiny or a decision which is not decided or taken by him, but by fate. Lawrence starts the discussion with essential questions that address MacEwen's thought. MacEwen begins the poem with Lawrence's claim of not choosing the idea of going to Arabia, but these lands themselves chose him, as if he wants to neglect or remove any scolders against his activities in the Arabian battles. Lawrence's apology takes the side of discussing main subjects of Arabian life, like the desert, identity, the views towards the Arabs and even a whole scope of seeing the eastern world. This stanza comes across crucial details which question aspects of social, personal, political and cultural representation. In these lines, MacEwen discusses the way a western intruder feels while living among the Arabs. "What I was, that soiled outsider doing among them?", such question carries within it deep levels of meaning concerning the identity of Lawrence and his condition of living among the Arabs both as military leader and as a westerner looking forward for finding out or discovering the soul. The question tests Lawrence's psychological recognition of his existence in Arabia and relates Lawrence's puzzle to a wider universal view, which sheds the light on the situation that a western soldier may face while living in the desert of Arabia. The Canadian critic and academic scholar R.F.Gillian Harding discusses Lawrence's personality from different corners in *The T.E. Lawrence Poems*. In "Apologies" for example, Harding claims that Lawrence produces himself as to interpret psychological factors inside him. As Harding notes, "...from a position of idealistic, and altruistic impulse in *Apologies* in which Lawrence expresses a need to give himself to the Arab

cause...".²¹ What MacEwen does is offering an unanswered question that leaves her to interpret the situation according to her own understanding of the event. The question goes behind discovering levels of identity, to address the case of losing one's identity by living a state of confusion between his or her inherited identity and the acquired one. MacEwen wants to show Lawrence's state as an outsider, as a person who discovers his lost identity out of living between two different cultures or worlds. Then the whole undetermined interpretations come to have a result that may not convince the speaker, but at least gives real declaration to his unsettled problem. "I was not becoming one of them, no matter what you think". This statement applies MacEwen's theory of the impossibility of a western being to live among easterners or Arabs. Westerners can admire the east, imagine an eastern new character for themselves, but never can they live a normal life among the Arabs, and this what happens to Lawrence who becomes the leader of Arab army against the attacks of Ottoman Empire. David Murphy describes the character of Thomas Edward Lawrence as "an extraordinary man" in his book *Leadership, Strategy and Conflict: Lawrence of Arabia*:

Lawrence was an extraordinary man by any analysis, and he found himself in the midst of extraordinary events. Once posted to Arabia in 1916, he displayed an uncanny ability to assess the various Arab leaders and later to encourage them to support the Allied vision for the direction of the revolt. Above all, Lawrence showed himself to have an almost instinctive grasp of guerrilla warfare. While he had little formal military training, he identified correctly his enemy's weaknesses and devised the best tactics to adopt in attack.²²

Lawrence explains what triggers him in terms of psychological turnings and internal conflicts. He recognizes from the beginning the way Arabs look at him. He expresses how people in Arabia can understand him as a person from another world living among them. They, simply, can understand him as an individual but they can never teach him their own internal relations. In other words, Lawrence finds it difficult to learn all what they do or believe. Their customs and activities are unfamiliar to him. He finds that his relation to them is a kind of an unrested struggle that has a longstanding effect on both of them. The differences between Lawrence's culture and the eastern culture come to be more manipulated in the poem. According to MacEwen's point of view, the search for power, control, identity and even the thrown stands for absolute reason behind the extended number of enmity between nations. Whether it is a western identity of Englishness or an eastern incarnation of the Bedouin life, they both find a kind of struggle for control and victory. That's why MacEwen in both identities whether the eastern or the western cannot find rest or settlement, but only an unfinished world of emptiness and loss:

But my mind's twin kingdoms waged an everlasting
war; The reckless Bedouin and the civilized
Englishman fought for control, so that I, whatever I
was, fell into a dumb void that even a false god could

not fill, could not inhabit. (subsequent reference to the same source will be referred to as *T. E.*

Lawrence Poems,29)

The third stanza of the poem differs comparatively. Though he continues complaining about the style of living among the Arabs, yet Lawrence's apology towards them becomes more

obvious especially after making some sort of similarity between his condition and that of the Arabs. John E. Mack portrays Lawrence's personality as a man of unique characteristics:

For while he remained in many ways boyish and emotionally immature, Lawrence was becoming increasingly perceptive about other people, sensitive to their psychology and personal needs, and paradoxically mature beyond his years in the experience of life and the handling of men. His own emotional involvements remained selective and highly controlled, and account for the intense sense of loneliness so many of his friends observed. The most significant skill Lawrence developed during these years was his capacity to use his knowledge of other people to move out of his own cultural framework.²³

He ridicules the way Arabs follow any idea given to them by others and justifies his own existence among them as an attempt made by a western being to give freedom or even contributing in providing that kind of gifted liberty which they mostly wish. But what happens seems to be out of Lawrence's control for he admits his failure to coordinate with them, his act of living among the Arabs and the intention of helping them turns to be unfruitful. Lawrence sees the Arabs as those blind followers who agree upon or accept any proposal displayed to them. However, Lawrence does not exclude himself from them for he apologizes to them and complains his failure:

The Arabs are children of the idea; dangle an idea
In front of them, and you can swing them wherever.
I was also a child of the idea; I wanted
No liberty for myself, but to bestow it
Upon them. I wanted to present them with a gift so fine
It would outshine all other gifts in their eyes;
It would be worthy. Then I at last could be
Empty. (29)

The end of the poem comes to be rather surprising. The whole act of apology and discomfort starts to turn into a source of beauty and harmony. Lawrence directs his attention from the previous tiring sense of apology into a new view out of which good deeds can be measured. He describes the appearance of the morning as a new beginning for a new life and also shows himself not as a military leader leading an army made of Arabs but as an important figure who lives among the Arabs leading them as members of an independent world:

You cannot imagine how beautiful it is to be empty.
Out of this grand emptiness wonderful things must surely
come into being
When we set out, it was morning. We hardly knew
That when we moved we would not be an army, but a world. (29).

MacEwen's aim behind writing such a poem is conveying a proper message which indicates factors of national differences. Rosemary Sullivan quotes what MacEwen says in an interview about her portrayal of Lawrence. Sullivan argues,

Lawrence was fascinated with Arab mysticism, with Semitic mysticism. He was drawn to the desert Arabs, the Bedouin in particular, among other things by the fact that they felt such great joy in renouncing the treasures of the world. It was almost a voluptuousness in not having any thing, not owning anything, and their relationship to their God was a passionate one. Lawrence

was constantly in awe of this but he could never achieve it himself and I feel the same way. This is one of the reasons I wrote the book in the first person, myself as Lawrence. I feel that way myself looking upon this marvelous religious phenomenon and not being able, quite, to participate in it. Knowing however what it means. I feel much more of a mystically minded person than Lawrence was. I feel perhaps closer to that kind of passionate fervour the desert Semites felt towards the God in this vast nothingness and a feeling of identification with the infinite, the one, the all, and the nothing, however one wants to put it. I feel that to Lawrence these were only words that fascinated him, concepts that fascinated him, but did not quite touch him.²⁴

The traditional western slogan of producing liberty and peace for middle-eastern culture can no longer be achieved. What she tries to show is Lawrence's apology for his inability to create a meaningful existence among the Arabs. By imagining Lawrence's condition of living in an eastern culture, MacEwen connects factors of cultural tendencies. The main reason behind any colonial agency in the middle-east centers around the traditional claim of preparing a condition of a civilized enlightened life that Bedouin life may not find. But from MacEwen's part, this act has no benefits. The call for global consciousness and international relations between cultures appears to be prominent subjects that MacEwen presents in the poems which deal with the middle-east. In 2004, the academic critic Brent Wood writes about MacEwen's construction of Lawrence's mythical characterization saying:

MacEwen achieves a unique effect in reaching back only so far as Lawrence, rather than trying to take the contemporary Canadian reader all the way across the divide to ancient Babylon, Egypt, or Greece by herself, she has only half as much work to do, and gains an advantage by exploiting as subject matter the mythic trap in which Lawrence finds himself. The reader's own personal relationship with myth, belief or cosmology is here doubly illuminated and a de facto line is traced through the history of the crisis of myth in the twentieth century west.... The alienation from One's own cultural background was much more the norm for MacEwen's generation than for Lawrence's, but even the search for alternatives in other cultures was just beginning to become a widespread phenomenon.²⁵

In her poem "Ali", MacEwen manipulates Lawrence's state living in Arab lands and his close relation to sheriff Hussein and his four sons. Lawrence meets sheriff Hussein and his family while working there in diplomatic activities. This situation enables him to see the condition of the Arabs more closely. The poem, however, is told in Lawrence's voice illuminating the way he comprehends their life. He describes Ali's personality as the best son of sheriff Hussein and his relation to him. Though the description of Ali is linked to a line of personal connection, yet MacEwen's intention is attributed to subjects of cultural relationships:

Yet when I said goodbye to him once, we walked away
In separate directions, knowing that we understood
One another far more than either of us could say,
And we were brothers just visiting the world. (30).

MacEwen's interpretation of Lawrence's relation to Sheriff Hussein's son is an incarnation of the connection between the eastern and western worlds. In spite of living totally different lives, Lawrence and Ali can understand each other more attentively. When Lawrence accuses the Arabs of being trivial or blind thinkers who follow any idea given to them, he invites readers into

addressing cultural and political concepts which spring from the mentality or the view-point of a person who lives among the Arabs and learns their customs. Such an attitude towards Arabs is reflected in MacEwen's poetry in order to show her extreme wish for calling for universal enlightenment. Joel Deshayes discusses MacEwen's presentation of the character of Lawrence as her twin and deals with Lawrence's connection to Arab deserts in terms of cultural relations around the world:

MacEwen comments upon the debt that Lawrence's stardom owes to his imperial presence in the Middle-Eastern fashion, language, myth and religion... Although MacEwen and Lawrence both dressed as middle easterners at times, they were both white. He was a British soldier in the Middle-East who was often photographed wearing the grab of an Arab prince; she was Canadian traveler to the middle-east who was often known for wearing the kohl eyeliner of an Egyptian icon.²⁶

Again Lawrence's admiration towards the middle-east does not turn far away. In "Feisal", for example Lawrence's imagination centers around the character of Feisal, the Arab warrior who leads Arab army against the Turks. Lawrence narrates Feisal's story and his leading role within his army, meanwhile; the attention towards Feisal's character seems to occupy a prosperous position in Lawrence's view towards the Arab leaders and their characteristics. From the view-point of Lawrence, a character like Feisal can be a kind of greatness and glory that Lawrence looks for in Arab deserts:

My lord Feisal, the man I had come to Arabia to seek,
Had a calm Byzantine face which, like an ikon,
Was designed to reveal nothing. Many times,
I learned later, he had watched his men
Tortured by the Turks, and his black eyes
With their quiet fire did not flinch or turn away.(31).

A brave leader like Feisal can guide Lawrence to a kind of a never-ending effect of admiration and respect:

When he was at rest, his whole body was watching,
And when he moved, he floated over the earth, a prince.
Once when I saw him, dark against the sun,
Its haze all gold through the silk of his *aba*,
I knew I would have sold my soul for him, joyfully. (31).

The description of Feisal's unique characterization springs from Lawrence's inner psychological reaction towards such a man. Harold Orland mentions that the relationship between Feisal and Lawrence is weaved with a sense of exchange between both representatives of cultures. In other words, Orland indicates the way Lawrence helps and supports the Arab army and prince Feisal:

He became a friend and adviser to the Arab leader prince Feisal; a dynamiter of bridges and trains who provided the Bedouin with British weapons, gold, and Turkish loot; commander of Allied forces in the Near East; strategist, tactician, warrior, politician; a bold, astute leader who

induced ungovernable tribes-men to attack the Turks, not each other. Even his enemies did not question his bravery.²⁷

The influential role of Feisal as a leader and guide of the army stimulates Lawrence's internal psyche to follow him or to imitate his role. Whatever differences there between the two, Lawrence and Feisal can understand each other. The crucial differences between their cultures create some sort of restrictions that they cannot pass, yet Lawrence's self-discovering talents enable him to see Feisal as a dignified Arab warrior who can address Lawrence's imagination:

And how do you like our place here in Wadi Safra?
He asked me, looking off to one side of me,
As though an angel stood there, listening.
Well, I said: but it is far from Damascus.
No matter what happened they would always adore him-
The prince whose name was a sword-
And I would follow my lord Feisal from Wadi Safra
to the ends of the earth. (31).

Lawrence's extreme attraction to Feisal is part of the western enthusiastic attitude towards that magical middle-eastern culture. What Lawrence finds in Feisal is the abnormal view that MacEwen once found in Salah, the Egyptian engineer. Consequently, this view is part of that continuous process of discovering the other culture that westerners always do. John C. Hulsman depicts Lawrence's role as representative of British forces:

Lawrence, is like many other Middle Eastern scholars including Bell, Woolley, and his erstwhile boss Hogarth, were to form the nucleus of what would be the intelligence gathering department for British forces in the Middle East. Active in advocating and pursuing politics on the ground, they came to be far more than spies or mere analysis; they became implementers of British imperial policy; "doers" as well as "thinkers". This dual role suited Lawrence perfectly.²⁸

Thus, they can follow endlessly what they want to find despite all risks. That is how Lawrence declares his journey following leader Feisal towards the ends of the earth or towards the meaningful ends of the essence of life. Towards a life that can provide what western scholars and colonials try to gain. Moreover the western traditional over-view of discovering the middle-eastern countries does not only exist for colonial purposes, but also for cultural and international outcomes. This can be referred to more clearly according to John M. Mackenzie's view-point :

Lawrence was an imperialist. He was a member of that generation which travelled with overweening self-confidence, using the badge of their Britishness as a passport to all kinds of cultural feats and voyages of self-discovering.... The uncovering of past civilization acting as a metaphor of contemporary life and as part of the Great Game of politics and diplomacy.... He was often a treasure-hunter who wished to remove finds to the British Museum.²⁹

The magic of the east can easily stimulate the western's ambition of gaining existence and control over other cultures, yet this kind of ambition is endowed with a never-ending impression

of magnificence and attention. For a poet like MacEwen and with her extended love for the middle-east, the cities and countries there represent some sort of spiritual attraction and peculiar enlightenment as shown in the following extract from "Visual Purple" :

Here are the cities of my spirit as I remember them
In time:
Mecca, Jidda, Rabegh, Yenbo, Un Lej, Wejh,

Akaba, Ma'an, Beersheba, Jerusalem, Amman,
Deraa, Damascus.
But only by day were they real cities.
By night
They were the kingdom that lay in one another's mind-
Our secret, intact kingdom shot with purple light
Unconquered and unconquerable. (32).

"Unconquered and unconquerable" is an influential statement that excludes the possibility for Arab cities to be conquered. Such opinion carries with it a dream-like vision of seeing middle-eastern cities as great as many incredible monuments that has their independent glory which prevents them from being controlled by any other power. They seem to Lawrence as part of imaginative world of beauty and brilliance that only their admirers can evaluate. In other words, MacEwen tries to focus on essential points that justify her choice of such culture to reveal her imaginative talents. Deshayee comments on MacEwen's application of Lawrence's character: ...she passes as Lawrence to imagine herself as a man, and to appropriate his stardom. This passing is a critique of Lawrence's imperialist acculturation into Arab society, and yet she does not entirely denounce him for orientalism.³⁰

In "Auda", MacEwen expresses her philosophy of the western eternal dream of mastering the middle-eastern world. The poem narrates significant concepts through normal conversation between Auda and Lawrence, resulting in showing the main reason behind which westerners illustrate their presence in Arab lands:

One night at dinner he got mad and stomped outside the tent
And tore his false teeth from his mouth
and did a little jig on them upon a rock
because they offended; a Turk had made them.
Later, when the night grew cold and we drank coffee,
I remember him musing: *Why do Westerners want everything?*
Behind our few stars we can see God
Who is not behind your millions
I said: We want the world's end, Auda. (33).

This declaration from Lawrence of wanting the world's end is a manifestation of the western intention of reaching the end of things. Of completing what they consider unsatisfactory about their life. To fulfill their profound need for controlling or mastering the world's best virtues or treasures. This idea is more reinforced in James. J. Schneider's words:

Psychologically, the energy and curiosity served his appetite for excitement in the discovery of new things. It also served his sense of humor, as his exploring curiosity directed him into the corners of mischief.... The great gear that drove Lawrence's personal motivation began to turn during his formative adolescence... The "new Asia" was the emergence of what we now know as the Middle East. The development of such a yearning in most people merely have remained a curious fantasy, but with Lawrence this fantasy became a motivational reality.³¹

Their frequent slogan of offering civilization to other nations is part of their false dream of gaining everything. But Lawrence's favorable respect for the Arabs leads him to see Auda not as a normal human with humble capacities, but as a great mentality who can never be ignored, as if he wants to show that Auda's secret is part of the mystery of the middle-east which Lawrence could not understand:

Afterworlds, I laughed at Auda and he laughed a little too,
But he looked at me sideways and I knew
That he knew something I didn't know
And have never known

It was colder than ever that night in Wadi Ruam. (34).

MacEwen's *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* is clearly her masterpiece of literary or poetic production. The whole book tells about Lawrence's activities and reactions during his life experience in the Bedouin deserts. MacEwen's aim behind writing such fruitful and influential poetry collection is inventing and achieving a middle-eastern mythology on her own terms. She successfully undertakes a mythical framework for her own personal portrayal of middle-eastern world and culture throughout the character of Lawrence of Arabia who once lived and felt what she always tries to convey. The historical Lawrence of Arabia adores the Arab world and lives among Arab people, but always senses that act of conspiracy while acquiring the western or European identity. The same happens to MacEwen who pursues for a sort of satisfaction or glory that, as she thinks, surrounds Arab nations. According to MacEwen's view-point, the most perfect way to show her readers what she actually experiences is poetry. By re-mythologizing the historical Lawrence of Arabia on her own way, MacEwen could be more close and effective to her readers. She wants to form a myth, a middle-eastern myth, and the best way of doing so is by associating her thoughts and emotions to poetry. The result of this is her re-invented Lawrence of Arabia who clearly functions as her own middle-eastern myth.

Notes

- ¹ Margaret Atwood, *Gwendolyn MacEwen: Volume One :The Early Years* (Toronto: Exile Editions Ltd, 1999), 11-12.
- ² Meaghan Strimas, ed., *The Selected Gwendolyn MacEwen* (Toronto: Exile Editions Ltd, 2007), 17. ³ Ibid, 15.
- ⁴ Ibid, 10.
- ⁵ K. Balachandran, *Critical Responses to Canadian Literature* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons Publishing, 2004), 15-16.
- ⁶ Ibid , 9.
- ⁷ Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce, ed., *15 Canadian Poets* (Toronto : Oxford University Press, 1970), 280.
- ⁸ Marco Colavincenzo, *Trading Magic for Facts, Facts for Magic: Myth and Mythologizing in Postmodern Canadian Historical Fiction* (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V.A. , 2003), 176.
- ⁹ Mary Reid, "This is the World as We Have Made it", *Gwendolyn MacEwen's Poetics of History Canadian Poetry* 58, www.uwo.ca/english/canadianpoetry/cpjrn/vol28/potvin.htm.
- ¹⁰ Rosemary Sullivan, *Shadow Maker: The Life of Gwendolyn MacEwen* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd, 1995), 186-87.
- ¹¹ S.H. Hooke, *Middle-Eastern Mythology: From the Assyrians to the Hebrews* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 13.
- ¹² Margaret Atwood, *Curious Pursuits* (London: Hachette Digital O. W. Toad Ltd, 2005). (Accessed 7/6/2015).<http://www.littlebrown.co.uk>.
- ¹³ Hooke, 11.
- ¹⁴ Stephen E. Tabachnick, *The T. E. Lawrence Puzzle* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 1.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 1- 2.
- ¹⁶ John M. Mackenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism And The Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 130-31.
- ¹⁷ Rosemary Sullivan, 321.
- ¹⁸ Gwendolyn MacEwen, *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* (Ontario: Mosaic Press/ Valley Editions, 1982), 1-2.
- ¹⁹ Harold Orland, *T. E. Lawrence Biography of a Broken Hero* (London: McFarland Company, Inc., 2002), 1.
- ²⁰ Gwendolyn MacEwen, *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*, 29.
- ²¹ R. F. Gillian Harding, "Iconic Mythopoeia in MacEwen's The T. E. Lawrence Poems," no9 (1984).<http://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/scl/article/view/8009/9066> (Accessed 8/9/2015).
- ²² David Murphy, *Leadership, Strategy, and Conflict: Lawrence of Arabia*. <http://www.OspreyPublishing.com>.
- ²³ John E. Mack, *A prince of Our Disorder: The life of T.E. Lawrence*(Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998), 40.
- ²⁴ Sullivan, 330-331.
- ²⁵ Brent Wood, "No-man's Land: Mythic Crisis in Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The T. E.*

Lawrence Poems" volume 29 2 (2004).

<http://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/scl/article/view/12753/13703>. (Accessed: 18/8/2015).

²⁶ Deshay, *The Metaphor of Celebrity: Canadian Poetry and the Public, 1955-1980* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2013), 190.

²⁷ Harold Orland, 7.

²⁸ John C. Hulsman, *To Begin the World Over Again: Lawrence of Arabia From Damascus To Baghdad* (New York: PalGrave Macmillian, 2009), 34.

²⁹ John M. Mackenzie, ed., 131.

³⁰ Joel Deshay, 187.

³¹ James J. Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader: T. E. Lawrence and the Arab Revolt* (New York: The Random Publishing Group, Inc., 2011), 5.

Conclusion

Among Canadian poets and novelists, Gwendolyn MacEwen is recognized as a prolific and extravagant writer of great tendency towards myth-making and mysticism. MacEwen voices for creating a world which answers her hunger for the ideal, order and perfection. From an early age, MacEwen emphasizes an attention to write poetry and her writing concentrates on producing poetry for the sake of both enlightenment and enjoyment. Further, the use of myth in Gwendolyn MacEwen's poetry stands for a major technique for rendering the ideal form of life that she finds in the civilizations of the past and in far away cultures other than Canada. Her extremely profound attraction towards middle-eastern culture is illuminated through her poetry and fiction writings. She aims to write about the world of the middle-east so as to enrich her Canadian tradition with those great and marvelous monuments of glory her Canadian culture lacks. The turning towards the culture of the middle-east is one effort by which MacEwen quests the enchanted as well as the mythical from the mundane and commonplace world. MacEwen's use of mythology is defined in relation to presenting crucial view-points which concern modern man's being in modern time and his own personal response towards the universe. On the one hand, MacEwen uses her mythic imagination to highlight modern man's evils as he tries to recognize his attitude towards the condition of disorder and disorder which surrounds his society and, thus, she considers ultimate questions that exist in his own mind. On the other hand, MacEwen makes use of her mythical outlines in order to reproduce her personal outlook towards life. She implements her own personal world-view so that her presentation of myth can replicate her own distinctive sense of dealing with an facet of life. More suggestively, MacEwen picks to use figures of mythical aspects in her poetry and re-establish them according to her way of offering a perpetual message which addresses humans generally.

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